

field in their favor. In states that have approved new congressional maps, there are now 15 fewer competitive districts than there were before. Fewer competitive districts increases partisanship, since candidates who only have to appeal to primary voters have no incentive to compromise or move to the center.

Finally and perhaps most perniciously, we've seen state legislatures try to assert power over core election processes including the ability to certify election results. These partisan attempts at voter nullification are unlike anything we've seen in modern times, and they represent a profound threat to the basic democratic principle that all votes should be counted fairly and objectively.

The good news is that the majority of American voters are resistant to this slow unraveling of basic democratic institutions and electoral mechanisms. But their elected representatives have a sacred obligation to push back as well—and now is the time to do it.

Now, there are bills in front of the Senate that would protect the right to vote, end partisan gerrymandering, and restore crucial parts of the Voting Rights Act. Bill sponsors have diligently reached out to their Republican colleagues to obtain their support. Sadly, almost every Senate Republican who expressed concern about threats to our democracy in the immediate aftermath of the Jan. 6 insurrection has since been cowed into silence or reversed their positions. When one of the bills in front of the Senate today was introduced in November, every Democrat supported it. And every Republican but one voted against moving it forward.

Protecting our democracy wasn't always a partisan issue. The Voting Rights Act was the result of Democratic and Republican efforts, and both President Reagan and President George W. Bush signed its renewal when they were in office. But even if Senate Republicans now refuse to stand up for our democracy, Democrats should be able to get the job done with a simple majority vote. There are already 50 Senators who support bills to safeguard elections. The only thing standing in the way is the filibuster—a Senate procedure that allows a minority of just 41 Senators to prevent legislation from being brought up for a vote.

The filibuster has no basis in the Constitution. Historically, the parliamentary tactic was used sparingly—most notably by Southern senators to block civil rights legislation and prop up Jim Crow. In recent years, the filibuster became a routine way for the Senate minority to block important progress on issues supported by the majority of voters. But we can't allow it to be used to block efforts to protect our democracy. That's why I fully support President Joe Biden's call to modify Senate rules as necessary to make sure pending voting rights legislation gets called for a vote. And every American who cares about the survival of our most cherished institutions should support the president's call as well.

PROTECTING OUR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

For generations, Americans of every political stripe have taken pride in our status as the world's oldest continuous democracy. We have spilled precious blood and spent countless treasure in defense of democracy and freedom abroad. But as we learned during the Jim Crow era, our role as democracy's defender isn't credible when we violate the rights and freedoms of our own citizens. And at a time when democracy is under attack on every continent, we can't hope to set an example for the world when one of our two major parties seems intent on chipping away at the foundation of our own democracy.

No single piece of legislation can guarantee that we'll make progress on every

challenge we face as a nation. But legislation that ensures the right to vote and makes sure every vote is properly counted will give us a better chance of meeting those challenges. It's how we can overcome the gridlock and cynicism that's so prevalent right now. It's how we can stop climate change, and reform our broken immigration system, and help ensure that our children enjoy an economy that works for everyone and not just the few.

Now is the time for all of us to follow John Lewis' example. Now is the time for the U.S. Senate to do the right thing. America's longstanding grand experiment in democracy is being sorely tested. Future generations are counting on us to meet that test.

Mr. SCHUMER. Finally, as we continue this important conversation about the future of our democracy, I ask my Democratic colleagues to consider the following: If the right to vote is the cornerstone of our democracy, then how can we in good conscience allow for a situation in which the Republican Party can debate and pass voter suppression laws at the State level with only a simple majority vote but not allow the United States to do the same?

Let me repeat that.

If the right to vote is the cornerstone of our democracy, then how can we in good conscience allow for a situation in which the Republican Party can debate and pass voter suppression laws at the State level with only a simple majority vote but not allow the U.S. Senate to do the same?

In the coming days, we will confront this sobering question.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

ISSUES FACING AMERICA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, a recent survey asked Americans for their view of the most important problems facing our country. Of course, we know what Washington Democrats view as their top priority. President Biden and Senate Democrats have been shouting—actually shouting—at the American people that an evil, racist, anti-voting conspiracy will destroy democracy forever unless Democrats get total one-party control of the entire government, starting next week.

But are the American people buying any of it? Is this what working families want prioritized? So let's take a look. In a recent survey, Gallup asked citizens for their priorities, what they thought we ought to be doing.

Do you know what share of Americans said election law? Less than one-half of 1 percent—one-half of 1 percent. Nobody in this country is buying the fake hysteria that democracy will die unless Democrats get total control.

Here is what people do care about: The top response at 21 percent was poor government leadership. About a year into the Biden administration, the American people's single greatest concern is bad leadership. And when you dig into the other issues, you can see why.

Some of the next largest concerns were either general economic problems or inflation and rising costs, in particular, and no wonder—no wonder. New figures, just yesterday, show our country continues to experience the worst inflation in 40 years—40 years.

Gas prices are nearly a dollar higher than a year ago; grocery prices are up 6.5 percent; and across the economy, inflation has exceeded 5 percent every month for 7 straight months. There is no working family who has not been hurt directly by this.

Another huge chunk of Americans said their chief worry is the coronavirus—certainly no surprise there. A year into the administration that promised it would shut down the virus, well, what do we have? Record-setting new cases. Shortages of testing. Shortages of important treatments, in part, because of the Biden administration's decisions.

We have reports of multiple States potentially limiting or excluding patients from lifesaving treatments on the basis, believe it or not, of their ethnicity.

And still, 2 years into this, notwithstanding abundant vaccines and a milder variant, we have Big Labor bosses in big cities being permitted to lock vulnerable kids out of the classroom.

Oh, and when kids are in the classroom, the Department of Education and the Department of Justice try to persecute concerned parents who dare ask what their kids are learning.

So these are just a few examples of real problems. These are the kinds of places where the American people need this dramatically unpopular administration to entirely refocus.

Yesterday, a new poll indicated that 33 percent of Americans approve of the President—33 percent. When he was inaugurated and pledging to govern for all Americans, to heal and unite the country, this White House enjoyed impressive approval ratings. But as the far left has been handed the reins, the support has cratered.

Now, there is a path forward for my Democratic colleagues to respond to the country they have so badly disappointed, but it isn't to try to break the Senate and rewrite election laws. It is to actually start tracking the issues that American families need tackled.

Now, there are also countless other issues which may not make national headlines but matter hugely to those who are affected. For example, next

week, I will again travel to Western Kentucky to visit some of the areas hit hardest by last month's devastating tornado outbreak. The national news cameras may have left, but families in this part of the Commonwealth are still trying to pick up the pieces of their lives after losing homes, businesses, and loved ones.

I am profoundly grateful to everyone contributing to the recovery process.

Our utility workers are taking on the herculean task of restoring public services. The Kentucky National Guard has played a crucial role in distributing supplies. Private individuals have donated food, clothing, and blood.

The Kentucky General Assembly just approved a State-funded relief package, and Kentucky's entire Federal delegation joined together to advocate directly for increased Federal aid.

This is going to be a long process. It will require consistent support on the local, State, and Federal levels. Rebuilding will take literally months and years—not days and weeks.

Well, I will be with these communities every step of the way.

Finally, beyond our shores, there remains no shortage of forces that wish to harm America and our interests. Senators will vote today on a measure to impose sanctions on Nord Stream 2. We can send a strong warning to Putin that he won't be allowed to use energy as a weapon. We can signal strong support for Eastern and Central European partners that have long opposed Putin's pipeline.

Even Democratic Senators who now oppose the sanctions they used to support acknowledge the pipeline is "a tool of malign influence of the Russian Federation."

Really, the Government of Germany should have shelved this project itself a long time ago. Berlin can still make the right call.

These sanctions, like the prior Nord Stream 2 sanctions that had overwhelming bipartisan support here in Congress, are not about driving a wedge in Europe. The pipeline itself is the wedge. That is the whole point. That has been Putin's goal—decoupling Ukraine from Europe and making Europe even more reliant on Russian gas.

So for Senators who seem more concerned about standing with Berlin than with Kiev, this bill includes a waiver. We expect President Biden would actually exercise the waiver.

But a clear bipartisan message would still be sent, just like when 98 Senators voted to enact CAATSA in 2017, just like when Democrats signed off on the previous bill to sanction Nord Stream 2 in the 2020 NDAA.

So I hope each of our colleagues will support Senator CRUZ's measure. The Senate must show we are focused on real-life threats to democracy, to security, and to our friends.

As we speak, Russia is literally preparing to escalate its military assault on Ukraine. It has amassed more than 100,000 troops on Ukraine's border. De-

terrering Russian aggression and preparing for the very real threat of a major war on the European Continent will take far more than these sanctions.

It will take urgency and seriousness from the administration. Time is of the essence. Our delays in getting emergency assistance to Ukraine approved do not inspire much confidence.

The administration cannot move at the speed of bureaucracy. That won't cut it. Humanitarian and military support to Ukraine cannot wait. Reinforcing American and NATO positions in Europe cannot wait.

We must not pull our punches out of some fear of provoking Putin. What will encourage Putin is if he senses American weakness. Ukraine and our eastern flank NATO allies deserve our support.

They are on the frontlines of a much broader war that Russia and China are conducting against the democratic international order itself. This order helps America. It benefits our national interests, and it benefits our allies, but it is not going to enforce itself. It will not defend itself. And our allies will not act if America fails to lead.

Our Nation's contest with China and Russia is the biggest challenge we face. It will entail significant risks and perhaps, God forbid, serious sacrifice.

Meeting these challenges and preventing the worst will take the kind of unity and bipartisanship that President Biden promised—not the outrageous—outrageous—and divisive partisanship he has embraced.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

PROTECTING EUROPE'S ENERGY SECURITY IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to consideration of S. 3436, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S.3436) to require the imposition of sanctions with respect to entities responsible for the planning, construction, or operation of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and their corporate officers and to apply congressional review under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act to the removal of sanctions relating to Nord Stream 2, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

S. 3436

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I come to the floor today to speak in opposition to S. 3436, which is the Nord Stream 2's sanctions bill sponsored by Senator CRUZ.

I certainly share the concerns that have been expressed just a few minutes

ago by Senator MCCONNELL about the threat that Russia poses to Ukraine and to Eastern Europe and the role that Nord Stream 2 plays in that critical issue.

I have been a strong and long-standing opponent of Nord Stream 2. I believe now what I believed at the time that I originally cosponsored the Nord Stream 2 sanctions bill with Senator CRUZ; that the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline is a long-term threat to the energy security of Europe.

But right now we are in a different place on this, and while Senator CRUZ and I worked together on sanctions legislation to stop this pipeline, my disagreement now with Senator CRUZ is in his approach to what we need to do to address what is right now a much more serious threat to Europe, to NATO, to the transatlantic alliance, and that is Russia's threat against Ukraine.

And what Senator CRUZ's bill would do is not stop Nord Stream 2; it would undermine the current diplomatic situation that is absolutely critical if we are going to respond to the Russian threat.

His bill is a vote—supporting his bill would be a vote to compromise the transatlantic community. It is a vote that breaks the message of bipartisan support in the face of Russian aggression and, furthermore, not just bipartisan support but allied support with the United States and Germany and Western Europe against the threat that Russia poses to Ukraine and really to Eastern Germany if they take this action.

The dynamics on Nord Stream 2 have changed since Senator CRUZ and I fought for the passage of legislation to prevent the completion of that pipeline. At the time, we worked together to provide the Trump administration with critical tools to sanction this pipeline, and we did that because there were some members of the Trump administration who came to us and said: We need this legislation because the administration has not acted.

And the fact is, 95 percent of the construction of the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline was completed during the Trump years. Unfortunately, the Trump administration, even after we passed that sanctions legislation, sat on those sanctions.

They waited until literally the last day of the Trump administration to sanction just one entity, just one entity in 4 years. And so what we saw is what I just said; that 95 percent of that pipeline was completed during the Trump years.

Now, we are in a very different situation right now, unfortunately, because we are in a situation where Russia is threatening Ukraine, and we need to work closely with our European allies to present a united front against Russia.

We have strengthened our relationship with our German allies. The Biden administration has restored a diplomacy-first foreign policy, which seeks